



NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

Toolkit

Unlocking the Mystery of
Media Relations



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Toolkit: Unlocking the Mystery of Media Relations

What Do I Need to Know?

Media relations can be a positive experience. Newspaper, radio, television and the Internet are excellent ways to communicate information. If the media covers your story, thousands of people will read, hear or see your message, which will help raise awareness about missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

Preparation and poise are the two key attributes you need when working with the media. Be prepared for media attention at any time. If you're prepared, you are more likely to be relaxed and poised. You will be able to express your thoughts clearly and confidently.

Wherever you are, please remember that **you have rights!** You have the right to say “yes” to an interview, for example, but you also have the right to say “no” or “this is not a good time for me.” This is especially true for those of us who have personal connections to missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Each family or community deals with loss or grief in different ways, and it is unfair to assume that everyone is ready or willing to share their story. If you choose not to speak to the media, make your family and friends aware of your decision.

If you do agree to do an interview, remember that you are in control! You can decide when and where you meet or the best time for a reporter to call you. You can ask for the questions ahead of time to prepare or decline if you don't like the questions. You can also stop an interview at any time—either to collect your thoughts or to end the interview.

Please remember that NWAC staff members are here to help you and your family prepare for any interview or speaking engagement. We can give you pointers and coach you. Let the media know that NWAC and Sisters In Spirit representatives are also available to answer questions, give quotes, and provide necessary context and background information.

Together, we can make sure the right messages are getting out there.



Why not make the first move? Invite media to any public event you are hosting or attending, and offer to do an interview.

The Six Do's of Media Relations

Do ask questions. What is the purpose of the interview? What kind of questions does the reporter want to ask and how long will it take? You may also find it helpful to write the questions down. Remember, *you* are in control!

Do listen to what the reporter is asking. Keep your answers short and simple. Radio, for example, uses 5- to 10-second “sound bites,” and TV requires 15- to 20-second clips. Newspapers need detail, detail, detail.

Do take the time to answer a question again if you need to. If you make a mistake or flub an answer, don't be afraid to go back and clarify your point.

Do ask for clarification if you need it. If you don't understand a question, ask the reporter to explain what he or she means. If you don't have the answer or are not the right person to answer the question, say so. You can always get back to him or her with an answer in a timely fashion, or have someone else answer the question on your behalf.

Do keep calm and focused. Some reporters may be aggressive and rude, and may ask leading questions to spark an emotional response. Be careful to keep your emotions in check so as not say something you may later regret. If a reporter is being too aggressive, you have the right to end the interview immediately.

Do follow up. If a reporter is rude, misquotes you, or publishes or broadcasts incorrect information, call him or her for clarification, or file a complaint with the news assignment desk or news director. Follow up your complaint or concern with a letter demanding a response.

Addendum for Families

How can I protect the reputation and character of a loved one in the media? This is the most common question people ask us regarding media relations in the context of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Many families are hesitant to contact the media because they feel their message or story will be misused. We understand that this occurs and have prepared the following pointers to help you remain in control of your story, your message and the memory of your loved one. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further questions or concerns.



Keep local media informed of your event, make yourself available for interviews and provide background information on the issues.

Discuss what type of relationship you want with any reporter. Will this be a one-time interview? Or is it important for you to be in regular contact with him or her? You may also feel more comfortable if you always meet in person, or if the reporter spends some time with you and your family so that you get to know one another.

Encourage the media to focus on the life and humanity of Aboriginal women and girls. Share childhood memories, for example, or the major accomplishments in your loved one's life. Remind reporters that your loved one is a daughter, sister, auntie, mother or grandmother. Focus on the fact that she is loved, will always be loved and is sorely missed. Suggest that reporters use the name of your loved one as often as possible.

Urge the media to steer clear of the usual negative stereotypes. Let reporters know whether certain terms or labels offend you and your family. The media can often portray Aboriginal women and girls as hopeless or troubled drifters. Conversely, the media pay little attention to the lack of culturally specific services in cities, or to the way Aboriginal women and girls are targeted because of their gender and Aboriginal identity. Remind reporters that NWAC staff members are available to provide historical background and context. If a reporter is unwilling to be mindful of the way he or she presents Aboriginal women and girls, you have the right to end the interview.

Ask the media to encourage discussion and reflection. Underscore the fact that Aboriginal women and girls in Canada should not be going missing or be murdered—that their human rights are being violated. Canadians and the Canadian government are often outraged about this type of violence if it occurs in other countries. They should apply the same principle when an Aboriginal woman is targeted in Canada. All these women are victims and did not deserve their fate. This is not just an Aboriginal issue; it is a Canadian issue. You may ask reporters to repeat these messages back to you to ensure they understand what you are talking about.

Last, hold the media accountable for their portrayal of Aboriginal women and girls in general and your loved one specifically.

Be honest with reporters when they contact you and let them know that you will follow up with them and their supervisors. If you are misquoted, follow up and write a formal letter demanding a timely response and public retraction. NWAC staff can give you advice on this process.